DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 308 795 HE 022 801

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TITLE	Helping Minority Students Graduate from College--A Comprehensive Approach. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-HE-88-11
PUB DATE	88
CONTRACT	ED-RI-88-062014
NOTE	3p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, The George Washington University, One Dupont Circle, Suite 630, Washington, DC 20036. (Free with stamped self-addressed envelope).
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Persistence; *Access to Education; American Indians; Blacks; *College Graduates; College Students; *Educational Attainment; Educational Quality; Equal Education; Excellence in Education; *Graduation; Higher Education; Hispanic Americans; *Minority Groups; Racial Discrimination

ABSTRACT

Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians remain less likely to graduate from college than other Americans. This persistent and serious problem is solvable if concerned institutions use a comprehensive approach, implementing 10 principles in order to successfully remove race and ethnicity as factors in college completion. The principles listed are supported by a 3-year national study of 10 predominantly white colleges and universities that have achieved success in graduating minority students over 10 or more years. The 10 principles are as follows: announce your priorities (the goal of eliminating racial and ethnic disparities); back your priorities (spend money to recruit, retain, and graduate minority students); employ minority leaders (to send a clear message about the value of cultural diversity); track your progress; provide comprehensive support services; emphasize quality (with plenty of diversity); reach out to community schools, agencies, and businesses (a community-wide effort can raise minority students' aspirations and academic preparation); bridge the educational gaps (with such bridge programs as extended classes covering required material, tutoring, learning laboratories, collaborative study groups, and intrusive advising); reward good teaching and diversify the faculty (cultivating minority professors by mentoring graduate students or junior faculty members); and construct a nonthreatening social environment (with no incidents of racism). Eight references are included. (SM)

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ERIC DIGEST

EDO-HE-88-11

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Helping Minority Students Graduate from College—A Comprehensive Approach

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians remain less likely to graduate from college than other Americans. This national failure undermines the foundations of a free society, interferes with efforts to build a competitive work force, and raises doubts about our educational system's capacity to respond to oncoming demographic changes.

This persistent and serious problem is solvable if concerned institutions use a comprehensive approach. Implementing only one or two of the following principles will not suffice. To successfully remove race and ethnicity as factors in college completion, institutions must attempt all ten.

The principles below are supported by a three-year national study of ten predominately white colleges and universities that have achieved success in graduating minority students over ten or more years. The success stories related here are from that study, undertaken by the National Center for Postsecondary Governance and Finance and funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) of the U.S. Department of Education.

Announce Your Priorities

Colleges and universities that publicly announce their goal of eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in degree achievement will make clear their firm commitment to educational opportunity.

Success story: Improved participation and graduation rates for blacks is a top priority at Florida State University. This was publicized in the annual President's Report to the Faculty and demonstrated by appointment of affirmative action supporters to strategic posts. Annual plans and progress reports on minority student admissions, employment opportunities, and support programs are publicized by each academic unit as well.

Back Your Priorities

Spending an institution's discretionary dollars to recruit, retain, and graduate minority students will communicate seriousness. Limiting participation to students eligible according to state or federal guidelines, or terminating programs when external funds are withdrawn, advertises a conditional commitment to equal educational opportunity.

Success story. The University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) has integrated federal programs and state equal opportunity equivalents into its undergraduate admissions program and into its academic advancement program. University discretionary dollars for these efforts exceed state and federal contributions.

Employ Minority Leaders

Employing minorities in senior leadership positions sends a clear message about the value of cultural diversity among professional staff.

Success story. In the past decade, the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) has doubled its enrollment of Hispanics, who are now a slight majority of the student body. Community support and fiscal commitment to UTEP have also increased, due in part to strong minority leadership. UTEP's dean of students, its dean of the College of Science, and its directors of financial aid and admissions are all minority leaders.

Track Your Progress

Focused strategies to increase minority opportunty are most likely devised by institutions that collect detailed information on minority and non-minority undergraduate achievement patterns.

Success story: Florida International University (FIU) in Miami has collected information on enrollment and retention by race, ethnicity, and transfer status for over ten years of rapid change. By analyzing student performance, FIU can focus resources where most needed and obtain high graduation rates for its urban, largely commuting population.

Provide Comprehensive Support Services

Institutions commited to equality will provide integrated and comprehensive support services and will take a proactive role in providing financial aid.

Success story: California State University at Dominguez Hills serves a diverse student population. Students in the affirmative action and equal opportunity programs now show retention and graduation rates that compare favorably with the general student body. Cal State intensified its support staff's efforts while increasing faculty responsibility for advising, recruiting, admitting, and referring students.

Emphasize Quality

Educational quality has too often been defined as a function of those excluded, while selective institutions have too often excluded minorities disproportionately. A quality education must include diversity—but not at the expense of rigor and excellence.

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Minority students need high-quality educations.

Success story: A 1986 *Time* article described Brooklyn College as "fast rising and ambitious . . . providing a first class education at fourth class prices." Brooklyn College's student body, almost one-third black and Hispanic, graduates students proportionately. All students must complete ten rigorous core courses aimed at "cultivating the intellect and imagination and at developing general mental rather than vocational skills."

Reach Out To Community Schools, Agencies, and Businesses?

A community-wide effort can raise minority students' aspirations and academic preparation. Elementary and high school students need role models, demystifying campus contacts, and adequate financial aid information. Community colleges and four-year programs should ensure maximum transfer of credits. Influential churches and businesses in minority communities should offer motivation and economic support.

Success story: Temple University's "Temple Mile" program includes high schools, grade schools, community groups, and nonprofit agencies within a one-mile radius of the campus. Thanks in part to this program, Temple has seen a dramatic rise in enrollment of black students in many fields not traditionally selected by minority youths.

Bridge the Educational Gaps

Bridge programs include extended classes covering required material, tutoring, learning laboratories, collaborative study groups, and intrusive advising. They should be afforded to underprepared students—the most vulnerable to academic failure.

Success story: Wayne State University (WSU) offers an outreach program for students ineligible for regular admission. After completing twenty-four to thirty university credits in special-format classes, these students may transfer to other colleges within the university. WSU also admits 350 marginally prepared students yearly and supports them for three years with summer bridge programs, skills instruction, and tutoring. Their graduation rate exceeds that of many regularly admitted groups of students at WSU and other urban universities.

Reward Good Teaching and Diversify Your Faculty

Effective institutions cultivate minority professors by mentoring graduate students or junior faculty members and by supporting them in additional graduate training. Rewards, tenure, and promotions should be awarded for good teaching—characterized by caring, mentoring, sensitivity to cultural differences, and high expectations for all students.

Success story: Memphis State University (MSU) has a significant gap between its proportion of black students and its few black faculty. MSU thus creates a position for any department recruiting a qualified black candidate. MSU's recruiting program pays moving expenses, gives released time from teaching, and pays a salary differential. Exceptional black doctoral candidates at MSU are offered support, provided they accept faculty appointments at the university.

Construct a Nonthreatening Social Environment

Incidents of racism can hamper the progress of minority students, even in those who are best-prepared academically. Discrimination, harassment, and low expectations for minorities must be eliminated. Proportional representation is essential in helping minority groups retain their sense of cultural identity and avoid isolation. If needed, proportional representation should be supplemented by special programs, services, and facilities.

Success story: Hispanic and American Indian graduates at The University of New Mexico (UNM) describe campus friendships as a function of location or discipline rather than race or ethnicity. Minorities comprise forty percent of UNM's enrollment. UNM successfully educates and graduates minority students who are respected and well-accepted within a multicultural state and community.

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This publication was partially prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. ED RI-88-062014. The opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the Department.

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